

Fall 1997

The Vehicle, Fall 1997

Dave Moutray

Eric Foote

Amanda Davis

Blanca Delgado

Chad P. Elliot

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Dave Moutray, Eric Foote, Amanda Davis, Blanca Delgado, Chad P. Elliot, Joe Howard, Michael Kawa, Rafael Gomez, Kim Hunter, Doug Strahan, Ryan Reeves, Michael H. Lake, Sylvia Whippo, Kelly Flohr, Marla Nelson, Nicole Guzaldo, Natalie Macellaio, Elizabeth Delgado, and Gwen Griffin

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The Vehicle

Fall 1997

Vol. 39, No. 1

Editors

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**Produced by Sigma Tau Delta
English Honors Society
Eastern Illinois University**

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—David Moutray

dancing

cheap perfume covering fake emotions
two dollar drafts and topless ladies
contrived gyrations against poles and runways
widen the eyes of men lost in lust
and loosen even the tightest of wallets

weakened by eager smiles on pretty faces
and teased to the point of titillation
he offers up a ten spot
to join in on the dancing festivities

his newly purchased partner
guides him through the smoke filled air
to a stool and mirror designed for the dance
she grins, disrobes, and tells him not to be scared
all in one professional motion

two feet propped to the rungs of the stool
two hands mildly attached to her thin waist
she performs with dispassionate grace
her soft posterior glides and manipulates
her breasts correspond in unison with each movement

his mind is now cluttered
to the point of consciousness
struggling to grasp
an unwielding guilt
between mirror and stool
between guilt and lust
he loses the battle
and reaches for his wallet

– David Moutray



and rescues for his wallet

— David Maloney

Braver Shades of Fire

Melt my soul
With red star coals
As Jack comes tumbling after

and

Cream my corn
With Ginger porn
Dear Liza a hole

and

Flame my berry
With foreign cherries
For dear Liza there's a hole

and

Pull my scab
While blood pours bland
As Jack comes tumbling after

—Eric Foote

Shades of Twilight

— Amanda Davis

A Cover

too soon the familiar night reigns down
filling innocence with futile fear

smack, screams, red

burying her head into the ashen quilt
she tightens her fragile hands
through its mice chewed holes

frightened brown eyes peek softly through
to greet scarlet blood slowly trickling

drip, stain, drip

down cracked lips and a blackened chin
a paisley night dress yanked and ripped
hearing her mother plead, "Harvey Stop"

unanswered prayers

a slam against the cement wall matched
by a recurrent thump of the bed upstairs
squeaking and moaning down through thin tiles

bang, shatter, thrill

certain to crash down and kill slim bones
wondering why at eight this has to be her life

she wraps her only armor closer

quilt, please protect

frail thighs rub together pale from cold,
and she wishes herself into a breeze
carried off away, far away from this

to heaven maybe

where her tainted yellow dress is red and new
and patent leather cushions growing feet
where she can walk without shame

above all this

from that which depletes her being

— Amanda Davis

Soup kitchen

Noise fills the mind of a man
standing out cold
waiting to be fed
his eyes are dark
his hands are dirty
he's proud
but tired
of his worries
each day he goes on
only to find himself
back in that line

– Blanca Delgado

Shades of Truth

Dark somethings
thriving
in unholy times
corrupted the weak
with religion.

– Chad P. Elliott



A Red Coffee Mug

The Fog

Early this morning,
driving the river road, north of Alton,
I wish the one I love were with me,
together we could see how the fog
lifts off the Mississippi
in a mid-summer thickness
where the bargemen, like ghosts,
release the vessels from their docks.

When I roll the window down
I taste her skin
melting around me,
the magnetic grace
of a falling snowflake's curve
dressed in mortal flesh
blown pink in the humid air.

But damn the distance
that keeps me inside these bones,
as I drive past the lock and dam,
and remember the old men's stories
of great catfish on the river bottom,
shadowy bodies larger than any single human
who live all their lives unseen beneath the surface,
and I think of the watery blue of an eye
that in passion's greatest moment,
can only a tear let go.

Horse-spit

Standing bare-foot on top of a kitchen chair
that I dragged across the linoleum floor,
I watch my older sister Lora's wooden spoon
stirring a pot of boiling foamy oatmeal.

I watch the geysers of white oats and foam
rise to the surface of gump in the silver pot,
only to fall and roll under the other oats
while my sister spoon-pushes them around.

I ask my sister, "why does the oatmeal
get all bubbly and foamy?" She tells me
that "Quaker makes horses spit into the box"
and that "all the bubbles are horse-spit."

I tell her "No, you lying," even though I know
she's right; she's always right because she's
older. I sit down and watch "Bugs Bunny,"
while she finishes cooking our oatmeal.

Breakfast is ready and I don't want to eat no
horse-spit; so I tell Lora "I'm eating Apple
Jacks, today." She tells me, "I was only kidding,
there ain't no horse-spit in oatmeal; I lied."

But I'm no dummy; I know she's just trying
to trick me to eat horse-spit. I watch both Lora
and Becca, my little sister, put butter, chocolate
chips, and sugar on their oatmeal, and eat it.

I get a yellow Tupperware bowl and a spoon
and fill my bowl with two glumps of oatmeal.
I pour sugar and chocolate chips on my oatmeal,
while making a butter pond in the middle of it.

I watch my sisters as I skeptically get a spoonful
of oatmeal and eat it. Lora busts out laughing
and yells, "You're eating horse-spit." I spit out
my oatmeal, punch her, and run out of the kitchen.

— Michael Kawa

A Red Coffee Mug

On a late night like this
when the birds have started singing
and my neighbor's drinking coffee
with his wife on their front porch,
I wish I could climb inside the night
become the one instant
of a slightly whistling fall
when I knocked over
your coffee mug from the table
having shown up late
in an ugly drunk —
the thing didn't even shatter
just broke,
and let go whatever you'd kept inside
spilling flat as time across the floor.

— Joe Howard

Morning After

Pick the yellow-green
boulders from your eyes
I welcome mourning breath
with a juicy kiss....sloshing
like a ripe orange

The white sticky glue
between our lips is
pumpkin pie
Do not comb your knotty mess
let it be while I sniff up your neck
Sniffing the nectar of
last night's sweat

Let's go back to sleep
forever slumber
I need (want) to feel...
to feel your light breathing
in my ear again
Dreaming of hours before
Feeling me enter you
in more ways than one
With the spitting out of a
confession of love

— Rafael Gomez

— Michael Kawa

Watching Boys

Girlfriend
Look over there

my oh my

I must say
A fine specimen

Wouldn't be caught dead
Though, in that shirt

tacky, tacky

With a body like that-
Wouldn't cover it all up

And girl,
What is that?

hmmmmmmnnnnnnnn

All that damned eyeliner
Looks like a damned raccoon.

And that ain't blonde
Honey, that's Chlorox

Queeny tramp

And him being such a looker
Could obviously do better

Why we'd have such fun
If it were me instead

Nice to have someone around
For a change

color me happy

Those biceps....
One fairy comment and

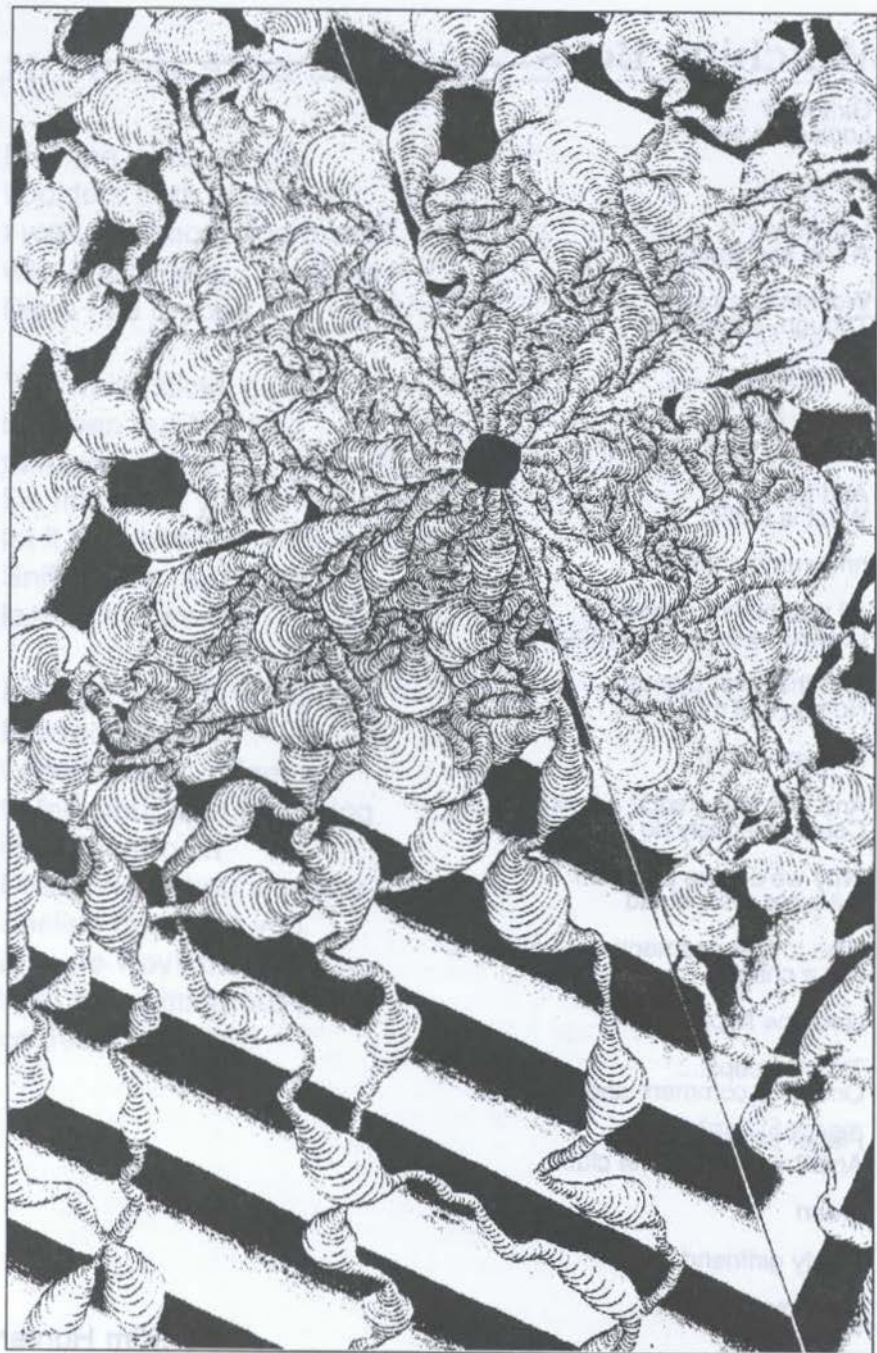
Flatter than paper
And the ladies at the club

green

If only girlfriend...

Look over there...

— Kim Hunter



Synesthesia in Mood of July_____

Dancing of blazing bodies in the Apartment 316 1/2
Upstairs- One wide-open shotgun abode
With the bed directly in the middle —

The heat comes in moist wisps,
Sweatening the climate,
Tempering the flux of mood
That turns as rapid as the match
That strikes the flint.

In time, In summer.

It dances outside the window
Up from the black pavement frying pan
Reptilian apparitions slither
Summer (IS) here.

Breathing out the radio, Billie Holliday's
Rasp dreams up Something on the inside
That starts churning and the windows I assumed were doors
Fog up— 98.6 degrees In a match against desert doom 120.

And our bodies lay limp in the bed
In the middle of the apartment,

Naked to the penetrating rays and vibrations
Instinctively moving in through out the senses.
The mist, if I could only see clearer
Settles on my skin through my eyes.

And her voice, if I could only hear clearer
Rubs my side so gently and calming
With fingertips that hear the cries
Ancient and Present.

Tear ducts beneath her nails pouring
At the touch— A river I vainly attempt
To dam.

Sea salt tears continually trying
To rid the burden of Summertime.

— Doug Strahan

picasso heart

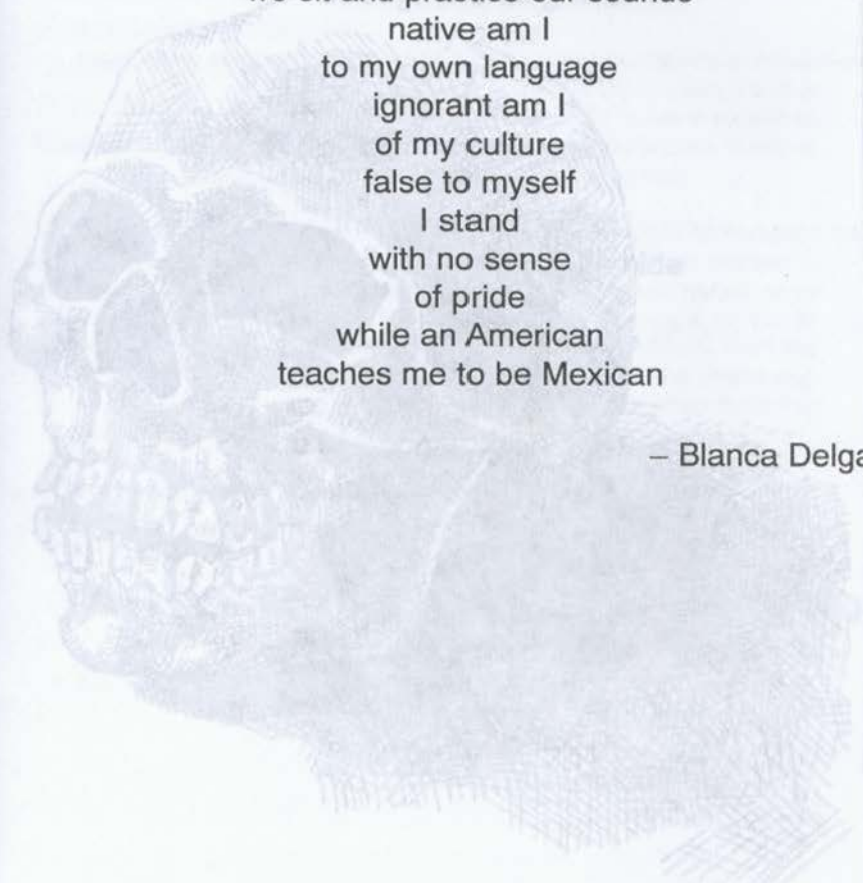
When we were watching the humidifier
you said you wondered what it would be like
to be like a light mist
and I didn't know so I smiled
trying to hide my ignorance
and you grinned back
batting your eyes I think
just because you knew it drove me crazy
and you know I wouldn't stop you
or say anything because
my heart's permanent residence is on my sleeve
and your eyes would always drift to it
playfully before you looked into mine
which you never liked to look at
for some reason like they made you uncomfortable
or that they were too extremely some thing
you couldn't describe and
I couldn't help to wonder if you were
hiding what you really wanted to say because
I think my eyes saw the paintings in your heart

Writ in room 8.31.96 @ 12:00 a.m.

— Ryan Reeves

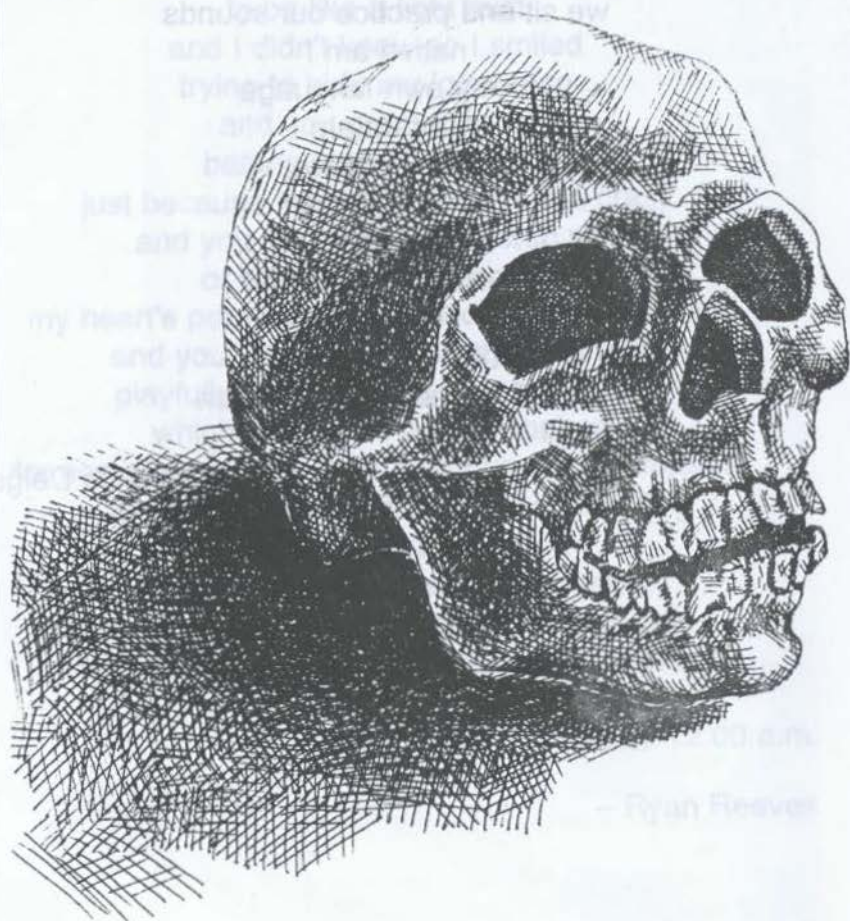
Spanish Class

Apocalypse



Dark evening
in a class
full of syllabi
we sit and practice our sounds
native am I
to my own language
ignorant am I
of my culture
false to myself
I stand
with no sense
of pride
while an American
teaches me to be Mexican

— Blanca Delgado



Apocalypse

Black water
carries dead bodies
through the long river
my crew
avoids eye contact
and finds
no one to blame
but know
the evil in the world
has too many places to hide
we're blind
or we're just not brave
to point the finger
on the guilty
so we keep on sailing
trying to find the goodness
the happiness that lurks inside us

— Blanca Delgado

CHRISTIANITY IN CALIFORNIA

A COMMERCIAL CHILIAST VIEW OF CALIFORNIAN SPIRITUALITY

Freeway-weary, hasting hearts hurtle into a traffic-jammed void
along the condo-clustered coastline that rings oceanic anxiety:
California careens into Millennium.

Mass-marketers research the electroneural nexus to find pleasures yet untested
to fill the many empty sockets of listless yearning,
to deaden dread or still waves of nauseated guilt,
to create a cocoon of comfort they call the "Narcosis of Narcissistic Nihilism":
California designers drug a virtually real Eschaton.

Limos, stretched full of painted people wearing pseudofur coats, whoosh past heaps
of hapless, helpless homeless who necrophage capitalism's corpulent corpse,
while "happy" families, rejoicing in presanctified polyester, cram into caravans
of cars on pilgrimage to various crystal cathedrals, where drive-up speakers
sell them blessed assurance policies with believe-and-receive money-back
guarantees, and then they spend the rest of Sunday praising God
with credit cards at the malls:

California defines Apocalypse as an investment-opportunity.

— Michael H. Lake

To Love a Mannequin

To love a mannequin
Is to revel in her
Perfectly arched feet
Her sculpted legs
From dainty ankles to
Subtly rounded calves
And smooth thighs that will never
Cover a hidden treasure
To love a mannequin
Is to delight in her narrow hips
And a waist Scarlet would envy
To love a mannequin
Is to marvel at her symmetrical breasts
With their permanently erect nipples
The gliding slope of her shoulder
The graceful line of her neck
Mesmerize
Her fixed gaze transfixes the watchers
Holds them in a paralysis of lust
Till the crushing moment they notice
Her Barbie straight hair
Is slightly crooked on her perfectly shaped head.

— Sylvia L. Whippo

CHRISTIANITY IN CALIFORNIA



cardboard wolverines

I don't know how long I was in that alley
But I watched the sun come up
The bum across from me
Laying on his side
On cardboard fields of
Soft comfort

He lay there in perfect prosperity
Not wanting or wishing away his dreams
No strange tuggings at your sleeves tonight man
You can rest for once
At peace with your wolverines
Put silence to the gnashing teeth
Of retribution

He parted his lips with an anchor
Stilling the little energy he had left
His heart stopped with a whim about warmth
Sending a flux of glacial wind through me
I felt my circuit short
And ran from that alley
Of the sunrise

I pushed their trashcans out of my way so
I could touch the metal earth
Clicking my fingernails on iron bottom sound
My thought of perfection lost
The beyondish daze of
What I once had
Within arms

I've always believed there was something more
To all this and everything had a reason because
The armies come each night
With words in their hands
And blades gripped in their mouths
And I always fight and wake up
Every time

— Ryan Reeves

There was a knock at the door. She looked up from her book and stared with eagle eyes at the foyer. The cats offered no explanation for this intrusion. They made no movement whatsoever to follow her, so the old lady had to greet the intruder by herself. The small-framed woman in her fifties slowly creaked off the sofa to answer the knock. She didn't get many visitors. The people from town left her to herself and the teenagers on Halloween came up from town to try to spook her. She moved back the curtains with shaking hands. The lace curtains on the windowed door couldn't give her any protection from the visitor's gaze. She was startled to look into the eyes of an odd-looking man.

He had long, light brown hair that fell over his eyes. He held his head down, as if he was shy — or trying to hide something. He was carrying a long, dark green pack, made out of a tarp. His clothes were old and worn, but they were clean. He had stubble on his face, as if he was trying to grow a beard or just hadn't shaved that morning. She opened the door; the screen door still stood between them.

"Yeah." She was intentionally rude. She wanted him to state his business and leave.

"Heard yer plumbin' ain't good. Like to take a look at it is all, ma'am."

"Who told you about my plumbin'?" Her mind jumped to the preacher, who visited her every Sunday afternoon.

"That nice preacher in town. I just got into town, and I was lookin'—"

"Well, you've had yer look. Now get off my property." She tried to hide her loneliness under the sternness of her voice.

"I'm awful sorry, Mrs. Sloten. I was tryin' t' help. An' I need the money." Respectfully he backed down the steps and down the hill to town.

She had already slammed the door. But she watched him walk away.

Neil walked out of this house, off that porch, 20 years ago. Said he couldn't take me anymore. "Take me". What right did he have to "take me" anywhere? Maybe I was glad to hear him finally say it after I had thought it for so long. Maybe I was glad he left with that school teacher. Maybe I was glad she wanted to "be taken" somewhere.

"Come back, Mister." She tried to put authority in her voice, but knew she sounded like a child begging her friends to stay a bit longer. He stopped, but did not turn around.

"Neil Miller. Not 'Mister'," he corrected her.

She held her breath. What a strange coincidence. She checked herself. She didn't want to be rude to this nice young man. "Mr. Miller. Forgive me." Satisfied, Neil Miller turned around.

"Thank ya kind. Point me in the direction of those pipes."

Neil snored so bad, I told him to sleep in the guest room so I could get some sleep at night. He was sleeping here in this spare room long before he left with the teacher. Even after he had gone, I thought I could still hear him snoring. Sounded like a buzz saw. I always looked at my perfume bottles on my dresser to see if they rumbled when he snored. Seemed to shake the house.

"You don't snore, do you Mr. Miller?" He looked up uncertainly from his mashed potatoes.

"No ma'am. Momma always told me that I've never been noisy."

"I have one rule if yer going to live here. Don't ever go into the basement. That's where my cats live, and they're pretty determined to keep it to themselves."

He remembered the folks in town told him about the Old Widow Slotten. He thought they were all mistaken; of course she was a little crazy, livin' up here all by herself and her cats. She was just an old lonely woman. "That's fine by me, Mrs. Slotten."

"Good, then you can sleep here and fix up the place during the day."

"I'd be much obliged, Mrs. Slotten."

"Don't call me that. I'm not 'Slotten' anymore. Call me by my maiden name: Presson."

"Suits me fine. Always thought Missus and Mister was too formal. Call me Neil — if you don't mind, Presson."

"Don't you want to see your room?" She was uncomfortable with calling him Neil and with him calling her Presson, with no Miss or Missus. She got up to show Neil to his room.

"Well, it'd be good t' have this room lived in again. Help yourself to anything here. If you can't find anything, my room is across the hallway. Pleasant dreams."

"Thank ya much, Presson. Don't let the bed bugs bite."

As Mae was getting ready for bed, she thought back to when her husband slept in that room. Neil was always clean. "*My Neil*," she had to say out loud to remind herself that they were two men. The man in the bedroom was a sloppy dresser. My Neil was always particular about his looks. This Neil seemed to not be shy with soap, though. Still, she wasn't so sure about his long hair and bristle beard.

Sometimes when she watched him do odd jobs around the house, she thought the way he moved reminded her of her Neil. Every once in awhile, he would straighten his back and stare at the sky. He stood there for minutes just staring, almost as if he was looking for something. Her Neil used to do that. Just before he left with the teacher, he would spend all day outdoors to avoid her. He even told her that was the reason. She was so humiliated, she told him to go get a job to make some use of his day. He went to town the next morning and came back with a job as janitor at the school. It was only about a month later that she heard Herb Mitchell, the owner of the grocery store, talking about her husband and the school teacher. She asked her husband if it was true and he told her that it was, with a challenge in his voice. She was defeated. He left town with the teacher two weeks later.

She rarely went into town after that. A boy came and got her the groceries, since she couldn't enter the store and face Herb Mitchell, or anyone else from town. She didn't even go to church, but the preacher came to visit once a week. She would have to put a stop to his visits, since he was telling strangers about her house.

This young man was nice, if he was a bit too quiet. He kept to himself. He went into town every night and came back early and did his work quickly each day. He didn't ask her about all the stories he must have heard from the people in town. She wanted to do something nice for him for not jumping to their conclusions. At the end of each day (his stay was stretching into two weeks), Neil Miller looked at the top of the dresser. Presson had given him many gifts: her husband's comb, shaving kit, and an old pocket knife. She made a ritual out of giving him each object.

Right before dessert each night at dinner, she would eye him suspiciously and ask if he could use a such-and-such. He would say yes, either out of pity for her, or out of a genuine need of his. She would smile excitedly and go into the basement and return with the object followed by a story about her husband. She expected him to be grateful. After all, she was sharing part of her past with him. Instead he felt strange touching some dead man's personal items. He knew what the town thought of "Old Widow Slotten". He remembered what Herb Mitchell told him about her.

"You be careful when yer up there by yerself. You know why she's called the Old *Widow* Slotten? See, folks round here think she killed her husband twenty years ago for cheatin' on her. Say she put him in her cellar." Neil didn't care; he needed some money before he could leave this town. He didn't think it was true anyway.

Each time he would smile and put each gift on the dresser in his room. After two weeks he had several articles arranged there. It was beginning to look like a shrine to this other man called Neil.

During the day, while he fixed fences or repaired the barn roof, he

wondered at what Mitchell told him. What if the body was in the cellar? He decided not to find out; he'd just finish his job and leave. He just came for the money anyway. At night he would lay awake and stare at Neil Slotten's picture on the wall, wondering what kind of man he was, and what Mae Presson's life was like before Neil Slotten had become it.

He stroked his empty chin where his beard used to be. She had him shave it because she liked her help to be clean-shaven. Fine, he thought, as long as I get free room and board. All she needs is to have someone to listen to her. But for all his pity toward her, he was beginning to think she was strange. On the last day of his stay, he came back from town and found her in his room by the dresser fingering all of Neil Slotten's personal things. She was muttering something about him finally coming back to her.

"Hello there, Presson." Before looking up at Neil she drew her hand back immediately from the objects on the dresser. "Just came to get my things together." He had decided to leave.

"I knew you'd be back, Neil."

"Yeah, I just came back from town a little bit ago."

"I knew you didn't love her. You came back to love me. Didn't you, Neil?" She looked up at Neil Miller. He saw in her eyes a look of happiness and confusion. Her hands were shaking.

"Presson, I'm not yer Neil."

"But you came back to me, didn't you, Neil?" She looked up at him, her eyes full of tears, her brows slightly crossed. She was a poor confused old woman, Neil thought. Suddenly he hated her for being so pathetic and dependent on the memory of her husband. He just wanted his money for the work he did so he could leave the house.

"Could you just pay me the money you owe me? Then I'll be out of yer hair. I sure do thank ya for 'lowin' me to stay here with you." He was nervous. She was still looking at him and seeing her Neil.

"Do you still love me Neil? That's why you came back, isn't it?" Neil didn't know what to say. He wondered if he should play along with her. He was sure he wasn't getting his money now.

"Mae, I'm thirsty from the long trip on the train. Could you go into the kitchen and make me some lemonade?" She went down to the kitchen, happy to be doing something for her beloved Neil.

Neil went over to a window and opened it. He threw his sack down to the porch roof. With one leg hanging over the sill, he muttered, "Crazy woman!" and he jumped.

He was halfway to town when Widow Slotten returned to Neil's room with the lemonade. She immediately saw he was gone.

"Neil, where you at?" Her cats just looked at her with their wide disinterested eyes. Neil Slotten's eyes stared at her from the picture on the wall. She went over to the dresser and straightened up Neil's things. "He'll want these things when he comes back. We'll just get 'em all ready for him."

— By Kelly Flohr

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Amanda Davis, senior English major: "'A Cover' was written after I heard a recorded 911 call made by a child who was trying to describe what was going on in her house one night. I wrote the poem because whether one is eight, eighteen, or eighty, domestic violence has no place in this world. Thanks to Dr. Tarter for always shedding light, Perry for the many smiles, and all of the 'cool' professors here who remind me daily why I chose to be an English major."

Blanca Delgado, junior Sociology and Business double-major: She has been published in the Prairie Light Review and by The National Library of Poetry in Melodies of Soul.

Chad P. Elliott, English major: "To write poetry is to wear God's mantle, at least for a short time."

David Moutray, junior English major: "David Moutray is currently a junior working on his English major. He would have had more to say if he didn't have nine novels and six papers to finish by the next day."

Kelly Flohr, senior English major, minor in Creative Writing: "I am from Bloomington, Illinois. I am a senior studying English and Creative Writing. Poetry is my first love; writing short fiction is a close second. I plan to go to graduate school to continue to learn creative writing at Colorado State University in the Fall of 1998."

Eric Foote, senior Philosophy and Psychology double-major: "SWM seeks F. I enjoy comedy improv with LOCAL COMEDY SENSATION HELLO DALI and listening to DARK

EDEN. I am a 5'11", 160 lbs man with brown hair and eyes. I am also a tackle box. If interested, please call."

Rafael Gomez is a junior Theatre major.

Joe Howard, senior English major: "Joe Howard had a good time."

Kim Hunter is a junior English major.

Michael Kawa, senior English major: "I can eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in two bites."

Michael H. Lake: "A graduate student in the English Department's MA program, I am a late bloomer 'boomer.' Although I have lived all over the West, I only claim Wyoming as my home. I wrote 'Christianity in California' in the Fall of 1994 while a student of Semitic Languages at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. The poem is a satiric protest against capitalist Calvinism and its hedonist incarnation in 'these latter days.'"

Ryan Reeves, junior English major, minor in Creative Writing: "...be straight in your soul and admit whatever feelings and act on them right away, don't let even a second rot." -Neal Cassedy

Doug Strahan, senior English major: "Tis the season, so scream naked."

Sylvia L. Whippo is a junior English major.

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Where there is no vision, the people perish.

– Proverbs 29:18